

## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT THE IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"?

### (Part 1)

Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

*"It was the founder of a house and his heirs who provided the impetus to build or rebuild, who might contribute ideas, and who furnished resources to finance the project"* ('Monastic and Religious Orders'; p.152; Burton, J., 1994.)



Let's put some authentic ancestral bones and a bit of flesh on that academically sound, authoritative statement above. And we have.....

*"It was .. Reginald mac Somerled.. the founder of.. Iona Abbey.. and his heirs .. the MacDonald Lords of the Isles... who provided the impetus to build or rebuild, who might contribute ideas ...like the raising of St Mary's church to the Cathedral of the Isles ... and who furnished resources to finance the project."*

But will the Scottish authorities acknowledge this truth? No. They continue to maintain it was the Iona abbot who financed and rebuilt St Mary's church.

They are plain wrong. Just like they were wrong in emphatically stating it was "inconceivable" for the Iona graveslab No. 150 to be the monument of Bannockburn famous, Lord Angus Og MacDonald, d.1318. It took seven years for me to prove them wrong and receive official acknowledgement in 2013.

See here :- <http://www.ionaabbeyandclandonald.com/angus-ogs-graveslab-no-150---savior-of-the-bruce.html>

And they will be proved wrong again. Historic Scotland acknowledged in writing in 2012 that:-

*"In the later medieval period, control by one of the most prominent forces in Scottish politics, the Lord of the Isles is likely to have had a strong impact on the island and its monuments **but the role of the Lordship on the architectural, ecclesiastical and political landscape of Iona is poorly understood.**"*

Yet, even understanding that weakness, they still maintain that the Lords of the Isles (unnamed) were only '*generous benefactors throughout or patrons*' for Iona abbey. This is about as completely inadequate and insulting as saying that Bill Gates is a prolific, high profile programmer for Microsoft!

Historic Scotland's flawed, inadequate account leaves the Clan Donald Lords of the Isles forfeit of any due recognition, outside of the minimalist role of being called mere benefactors or patrons for Iona Abbey/Cathedral.

This is a gross understatement of their fundamental contribution to this infrastructure, the resulting macroeconomics of the region and the truly EXTRAORDINARY three centuries long existence of the late medieval Iona Abbey and its Cathedral of the Isles - under the one family. In many respects, they are sidelined, what's more anonymously, to St Oran's Chapel which I have already begun to successfully rectify. At the moment a further eight graveslab attributions by me are being assessed by Dr Nicki Scott, Historic Scotland. Identifying individual and well known MacDonald Lords/Chiefs with significant Iona monuments is an essential element in my strategy to reclaim ("personalise", legitimise) and publicise the fact that medieval Iona Abbey and Cathedral of the Isles is the true legacy of various Clan Donald Chiefs.

For the general public to be misinformed that the Lords of the Isles were just patrons (and with limited modern meaning) or benefactors of Iona Abbey and Cathedral is substantively misleading in terms of a proper interpretation of the history of the site's extant architecture.

## Exactly what bit was left standing in c.1900...?



If you'd like to fully appreciate why, and I'm sure many of you do, it will take just a bit of further reading. Here is the first part of a 'short' 5000 word essay and I've made it as engaging and compelling as I can for you within the bounds of an academic environment. I'd like you to be enthused – to join the just cause!

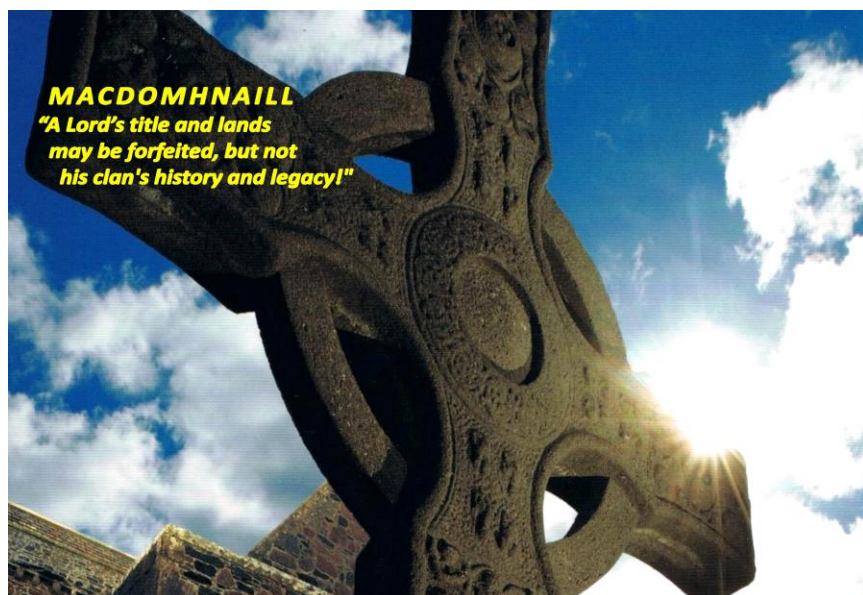
My website has various papers and pages on this which explain in more detail and with full references and footnotes, etc, eg :-

<http://www.ionaabbeyandclandonald.com/introduction.html>

What are we up against? Dr. Iain MacDonald, Glasgow University; 2013 :- ***"The Highlander has never enjoyed a good press, and has been usually characterised as peripheral and barbaric in comparison to his Lowland neighbour, more inclined to fighting than serving God"***. In his *"Clerics and Clansmen - The Diocese of Argyll between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries"*; 2013.

BUT, FOR EFFECTIVELY ITS ENTIRE EXISTENCE OVER THE WHOLE LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF 300 YEARS, IONA ABBEY WAS RECREATED, PROSPERED AND GREW UNDER THE ONE CONTINUOUS FAMILY OF FOUNDER AND HIS HEIRS, THE BUILDERS, PATRONS, BENEFACTORS, PROTECTORS, REBUILDERS AND CONTINUOUS ENDOWERS – FROM FOUNDATION TO PRE-DISSOLUTION.<sup>1</sup>

**THIS IS CERTAINLY RARE. THIS MACDONALD FAMILY OUGHT TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED PUBLICLY AND PROMINENTLY AS SUCH ON THE ABBEY.**<sup>2</sup>



(cont. next edition....)

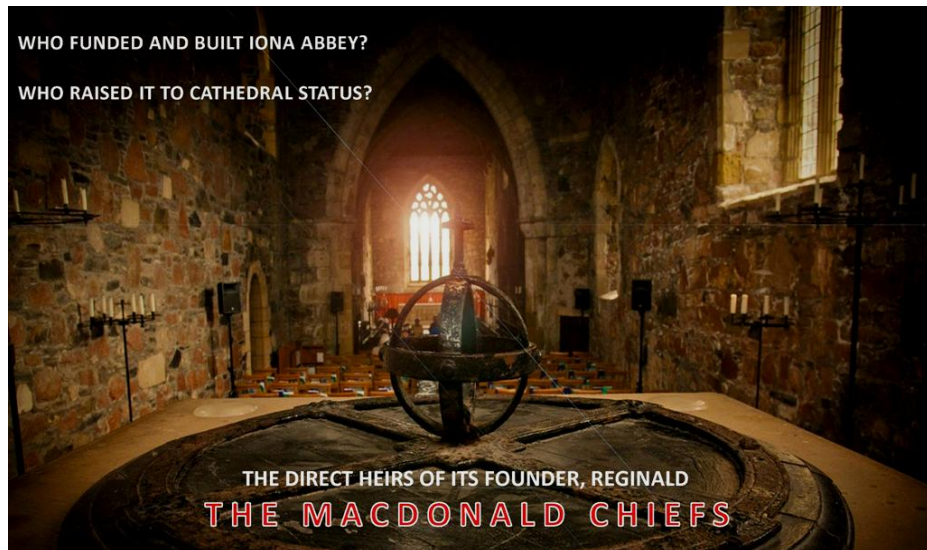
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<sup>1</sup> After the MacDonald Lordship fell, **BETWEEN 1494 AND 1534, THE ABBEY WAS BUT AN UNWORTHY, PATHETIC PASTICHE – A SLUSH FUND** for the "capacious greedy craws" of the Campbell Earls of Argyll and their agents, the many Campbell Iona Abbey Commendators (stripped Abbey's assets!). **In 1534** King Henry broke with the Pope and by the Act of Supremacy made himself the supreme head of the church in his lands. The 1535 *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (church valuation) was not done in Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> As used to be :- **"an inauguration stone, which stood beside the door of a newly built church, recording the name of the aristocratic donor"** (founder and heirs). *"Pilgrimage in Medieval Scotland"*, p.35; Dr. Peter Yeoman.

## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT THE IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"? PART 11

Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.



WHO FUNDED AND BUILT IONA ABBEY?

WHO RAISED IT TO CATHEDRAL STATUS?

THE DIRECT HEIRS OF ITS FOUNDER, REGINALD  
**THE MACDONALD CHIEFS**

There is a manifest sequence of strategic events that were orchestrated by Clan Donald Lords of the Isles over eighty years (1386 - 1472) to raise their ecclesiastical capital on Iona to cathedral status. If successive clan Donald chiefs (1207-1493, "*heirs of the body*", patrilineal successors to King Reginald mac Somerled, Iona Abbey founder) had not firstly exercised their military superiority and then powers and responsibilities under the pervasive and persuasive (legal) precedents underpinning "*conditionality of endowment*" <sup>1</sup> and also directly through ecclesiastical legislation and jurisdiction (canonical law) of the Roman Cura, then the "*impoverished*" Iona abbey, under "*threat of total ruin*", would have "*collapsed*" and been unsustainable well over a century before its final 16th century dissolution (protestant reformation).

Instead, it eventually prospered and the abbey church was enlarged and enhanced by Clan Donald's long term strategic intervention, at both a temporal and spiritual level, financed by their infrastructure spending. Endowment is not a static once off event, it is dynamic and it's conditional, feudal in its nature. "*Whatever the particular institution, the church held its temporal property on the basis of three tenures : barony and knight service, divine service, and frankalmoign (free alms). The first two were justiciable, at least in terms of its temporalities, in the royal courts while the last, frankalmoign, was a tenure outside the purview of common law (only adjudicated by the ecclesiastical ordinary)*" [John Wyclif, c.1320-1384; f/n1].

The conditions of tenure for Iona Abbey were :- "*divine or spiritual service*" - saving souls; compliance with the intended purpose of the abbey, proper use of its endowed assets and their income; and their integrity, maintenance. **"Of all the orders, the Benedictines have the most traditionally feudal relationships with their patrons, who are generally regarded as liege lords."** A problem that arises is that of the old, sentimental view that Gaelic society in the West was somehow pure and uncorrupted, and that feudalism was a polluting influence that 'advanced into the highlands in the manner of Original Sin, raising its ugly head in the Garden of Eden'.

Nothing could, in fact, be further from the truth; what little evidence there is suggests that feudalism was eagerly and easily adapted and utilised by the magnates of the West in the thirteenth century, and in many cases we see those same nobles adopting conventions of feudal society like knighthood, the building of castles, and the utilisation of charters to record transfers of land." <sup>2</sup> In the 13th century, the Lordship of the Isles was "already well on the way towards such a hybrid status".<sup>3</sup> Sir Angus Mor's mother was the daughter of Walter, High Steward of Scotland; he certainly had been knighted <sup>4</sup>. The "*Gaelic Charter of 1408*" (land grant) by Donald of Harlaw is a later example of "*a strong Gaelic cultural and social element in the Lordship (of the Isles) as well as its documented and feudal aspect*". <sup>3</sup>

Endowment is an ongoing, revisable process by law, by the founder's heirs, albeit there can only be one founder. Clan Donald Lords of the Isles were "hands on managers" of their investment right from the start and throughout the three centuries of their control of their "*ecclesiastical tenant*". Endower dynasties and their abbeys valued each other - the cycle of reciprocal benefits continued down the centuries. **The Macdonalds were never subsidiary to the abbey. They were *always* fundamental and *central* to it its whole medieval existence of 300 years.**

The Iona Abbot (of old, original Benedictine order) was not given tenure in free alms, *frankalmoign* – perpetual freehold, inalienable, 'hereditary' land endowment ('*in puram et perpetuam elemosinam*') for the major estates distributed widely throughout the Western Isles and mainland. Under '*free alms*' tenure, the Abbot could only recognise one Lord – God. Religious houses in receipt of free alms could not recognise a secular lord. The relationship between the Abbot and Lord of the Isles in this case would have been at "*alms*" length', ie, subsidiary. But this was clearly not the case because the Iona Abbot always served as a Lord Spiritual on the Lordship's Council of the Isles and '*Macdonald, King of the Isles*', made solemn oaths (eg, land grants) to his vassals '*sworn on the black stones*' before witnesses, just west of the abbey church (Martin Martin, 1695).



The 'Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland' (VOL 4; p.145) also concludes that some of the original Iona land endowments were re-allocated by Lord John Macdonald to his new foundation of Oransay Priory, c.1430 (Augustinian Canons) - meaning they were not originally inalienable, ie, not held in non-transferable frankmoign tenure by the Iona Abbot.

"Perpetual free alms" tenure was for Reginald's Cistercian foundation at Saddell (new, *reformed order* <sup>4</sup>), their lesser "donations" (cows, pennies, tithes on goods) to other foundations, eg, to Paisley (new Cluniac order) and a small, very late grant by Angus Master, 1485, to Iona. It was not for the main estates of their major, old order foundation, Iona, with "conditionally" endowed income producing lands that required feudal "functional reciprocity" of the abbey providing divine service - spiritual service, salvation for the Lords of the Isles' souls *and* for his kin, descendants and ancestors. Episcopal lands and revenue, not of the whole diocese's, but those held personally by Bishops, as ecclesiastical tenants-in-chief ("*incapite*" of the crown), had feudal tenure of barony and knight service (thus "warrior bishops"). Only a minority of the Abbots of the many centuries old, larger Benedictine abbeys in England, just after the 1066 Norman conquest, were treated the same as Bishops. (Incidence:- entirely arbitrary, by localities in strife; summonses not well obeyed; by c.1300, this "corporal service" had mostly defaulted to payment-in-lieu, *scutage*, and fines; knight service superseded by other forms of military service, eg, paid contract troops, and formally replaced in 1385.)

From foundation in 1203, Iona Abbey's major estates in the west did not have a military obligation, in their case to provide Gaelic/Norse ship service or castle guard. Besides *divine service*, Iona Abbey in fact provided a whole range of reciprocal services for the Clan Donald Chiefs and gave them considerable prestige and status as well. It was a place of privilege for the elite :- refuge and sanctuary for "*unfortunate*" noble women of the Lord's family/kin; education, law and medical services; hospitality-hospitalisation, retirement home. In house canon lawyers: drafting Vatican petitions to secure release from disabilities imposed by strict letter of canon law:- marriage dispensations, remarrying; illegitimacy, etc. They also obtained personal spiritual guidance on matters of state, feuds, battle, health, times of disaster and the art of dying, death. [*..continued..*]

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "John Wyclif as Legal Reformer"; (Conditionality of Endowment); William E. Farr; Professor Emeritus of History, University of Washington; 1971. From Brehon and Custom law to Feudal law to Scots Common/Civil law to English codified law, viz., Gaelic maxim in *Bechbretha* that "*no-one is obliged to give something to another for nothing*". And "*DO UT FACIAS*" : "I give [you] that you may do or make [for me]." A formula in the civil law, under which those contracts were classed in which one party gave or agreed to give land, money, in consideration the other party did or performed certain work. To the 2nd Statute of Westminster, 1285 (re-affirmed in the Commons, 1376), eg, sue a writ of *praecipe tali abbati* [*Religious Orders, Volume 2*; David Knowles] :- **Endowed tenurial lands of "Lords and their ancestors", alienated by their monasteries, can be recovered.** Albeit not frequently used. I'm not suggesting the Lords of Isles sued a writ as above or a "*contra formam collationis*". What is very clear is that "***The idea of confiscating church property was part of the ambience of the fourteenth century;***" "*practice sanctioned by long usage; fundamentally consonant with political realities.*" This is so, regardless that Wyclif's major aim of fundamental church reform failed (his evangelical concept:- ecclesiastical dispossession; repristinate Christ's Church). He was "*The Morning Star of the Reformation*".

<sup>2</sup> McDonald, R. Andrew; *The Kingdom of the Isles – Scotland's Western Seaboard c.1100-c.1336*, p.142; 1997.      3. *Ibid.*, p.157.      4. *Ibid.*, p.146.

<sup>3</sup> J Munro and R Munro, "*Acts of the Lords of the Isles 1336-1493*", Intro., ix; 1986.

<sup>4</sup> THE NEW ORDERS, post 1066 feudalisation - "They renounced all possessions and exploitation of feudal sources of wealth - a movement independent of secular control - economic units quite different to the greater black monk (old Benedictine) order" - D. Knowles (see f/n 1).



## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT THE IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"?

Part III - Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

WHO SAVED IONA ABBEY FROM :-

**"IMPOVERISHMENT AND COLLAPSE" BY THE "WICKED,  
NEFARIOUS, PERVERSE, TYRANNICAL" MACKINNONS, 1350-1450?**



### **CLAN DONALD NOBLES SAVED IONA ABBEY**

**IT WAS THEIR DUTY AS THE FOUNDER'S HEIRS :-**

- 1. JOHN MACALASANDAIR - CLAN DONALD'S 1<sup>ST</sup> IONA ABBOT;**
- 2. 'DONALD OF HARLAW' - LORD OF ISLES, WITH HIS 2 SONS:-**
- 3. ANGUS - "FIRST NATIVE BISHOP OF ISLES"; AND,**
- 4. ALEXANDER MACDONALD - EARL OF ROSS, LORD OF ISLES.**

Around 1450, John, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord of the Isles (1449-1493), demolished three quarters of the "almost collapsed" abbey church and rebuilt it into a much larger and grander cathedral. The easy, cheap option which an abbot of "extreme poverty" would make of just restoring the small, dilapidated church was not taken. Contemporary records repeatedly show Iona Abbey was 'bankrupted' by the "nefarious" MacKinnons' corruption and excess - they "usurped control of a substantial part of the abbey property" (all RCAHMS quotes). The buildings were collapsing, it was "impoverished in its rents" and the monks could hardly afford to feed themselves. The finance for this ambitious project was largely from the Lord of the Isles', greatly expanded treasury.<sup>1</sup> Between 1425 and 1476, Alexander, Master of Ross (1425-36), and then the Earls of Ross and Lords of the Isles (building on Donald of Harlaw's earlier groundwork) greatly extended their family's landed wealth and power through increased taxes and rents from their large, extra territories (ie, of Ross and Skye).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "It was the founder of a house **and his heirs** who provided the impetus to build **or rebuild**, who might contribute ideas, and **who furnished resources to finance the project**" ('Monastic and Religious Orders'; p.152; Burton, J.; 1994.)

<sup>2</sup> "Following the elimination of the Duke of Albany, 1424, the Earldom of Ross came into the hands of the Macdonald Lords of the Isles. Alexander, the son of Donald, achieved his late father's ambition. The Earldom carried the ownership of vast properties in western Scotland which resulted in the Mackenzies and other clans becoming vassals instead of kinsmen to the Macdonalds. The new (11th) Earl of Ross continued to hold the title of Lord of the Isles and the Macdonald clan became so powerful that they frequently came into conflict with the King who was relatively powerless against their uprisings. (McKenzie, Alan, FSA Scot; 'History of the Mackenzies'; 2006.)

From 1439 to 1449 (when he died), John's father, Alexander, was also *Justiciar of Scotia*, chief legal officer of Scotland to James II. Their income and wealth may have even doubled in the fifty years from 1426 to 1476 - the year of John's first forfeiture, when he lost the Earldom of Ross.

**This is the exact five decades in which the House of Macdonald** • Split the Isles from the Isle of Man diocese (within a year of Donald becoming Lord) • Broke the endemic corruption that was impoverishing and "*collapsing*" the Abbey and recovered usurped property • Annexed extra vicarages and petitioned for twelve canonries/prebends for the Abbey • Gifted the status raising corporeal relic and precious reliquary of St Columba • Rebuilt, enlarged and enhanced the entire Iona church. Their first Macdonald Bishop, Angus, had earlier moved his *Cathedra* from Skye to Iona Abbey<sup>3</sup> and after the rebuild it effectively rose to cathedral status. The Bishop of the Isles, Angus Macdonald, d.1441, was buried "*with his crozier and Episcopal habit, south side of the great choir*" in the Iona Abbey Church, his 'monastic Cathedral.' (Angus' son Angus also was Bishop of the Isles, 1472–1480.)

This cathedral raising strategy is firmly centered with the high stakes, ambitious power play of John's Treaty of Ardtornish-Westminster with Edward IV in 1462 and his grand prospect of ruling two thirds of Scotland, that is, all north of the Firth of Forth. This ill-conceived plan of "*JOHIS DE YLLE COMIS ROSSIE DOMINI INSULARUM*" was ultimately dashed with his second forfeiture in 1493.

The huge church rebuild was not due to pilgrim income (played a minor role then). It was not due to the new Abbot Dominic Mackenzie, but it is obvious why a Mackenzie was 'presented' by Donald of Harlaw, who, as heir of the founder, had that right of presentation or "assent" to the Abbey Chapter. Mackenzies of Kintail were of the large Earldom of Ross, which at that time was a relatively new and "fruitful", albeit contested, territory of Clan Donald. It is simplistic to deduce that pilgrims were the major source of the funds for the reparation of the "*collapsed church*" on Iona and that a new Abbot, Dominic (MacKenzie), furnished the resources mainly by a simple one-off special indulgence for feast day pilgrims in 1428 and was the impetus to re-build – as Historic Scotland, other historians and academics presume. They take a prosaic option and it's wrong (marginalising Clan Donald Lords).

It's not appropriate to simply extrapolate from other countries, regions, periods, different historical, ecclesiastical, socioeconomic and political paradigms.

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<sup>3</sup> 1433. At the height of Clan Donald's power, *Temporal and Spiritual*, the Bishop of the Isles, Angus (I) Macdonald (grandson of the King of Scots, son of Lord Donald (II) of Harlaw), petitioned and relocated the Episcopal See or Cathedra of The Isles (Bishop's Seat/Throne) from Snizort, Isle of Skye, to Iona. This seat is placed in the Bishop's principal church, which is therefore called, the "*BISHOP'S CATHEDRAL*". There can be no doubt whatsoever of an intention for a Cathedral at this early stage as in 1433 Bishop Angus Macdonald also petitioned to create 12 canonries and as many prebends, a type of benefice, endowed income [*Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome 1433-1447*, Vol IV, no. 5; 1983]. The members of the chapter of a cathedral are a type of canon - prebendaries had a role in the administration of a cathedral. The obvious burial places for bishops were cathedral churches under their jurisdiction and by long tradition, bishops and archbishops are buried in their cathedrals.



And what's more important, particularly so in this case, they completely overlook or disregard the obvious revealing events, backed with strong factual evidence, of the overriding historical narrative which clearly displays the systemic and systematic intervention and strong "*conditionality of endowment*" management by the founder's responsible patrilineal successors, the Macdonald Lords of the Isles.

Also overlooked were the obvious, practical stages of implementation of an integrated strategic and operational plan by them and their Macdonald Bishops and Abbots to:-

- "*secure full control of monastic revenues*";
- donate the prestigious "*hand of St Columba*" (like the contemporaneous "hand of St Patrick" reliquary pictured);
- make Iona their See of the Isles;
- then rebuild, enlarge and raise the status of St Mary's Church to the Cathedral of the Isles (full chronology next page).

**1390-1480. "The Macdonald"** titled heirs ("*2<sup>nd</sup> estate bellatore*", noble Chiefs) and their "*de insulis*" kinsmen elites ("*1<sup>st</sup> estate oratores*", Church prelates) acted as a corporate entity, managing the eight generation inherited enterprise of their abbey (the right of patronage is hereditary and so are the responsibilities). They protected their investment and the core "*functional reciprocity*" of the eminent foundation of their forebear, Ragnall mac Somairle, "*Rex Insularum, the most distinguished of the Galls or the Gael for prosperity, sway of generosity and feat of arms.*" (To be continued....)

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***"IONA CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES" was raised by CLAN DONALD HIGH CHIEF, LORD OF THE ISLES, "JOHIS DE YLLE COMIS ROSSIE DOMINI INSULARUM", c.1450-80.***

***This political goal was the zenith of a many decades long sequence of connected events.....***

**BY SUCCESSIVE CLAN DONALD CHIEFS (FOUNDER'S HEIRS) and CLAN DONALD ABBOTS, BISHOPS MANAGING "CONDITIONALITY OF ENDOWMENT".**

- 1386.** Donald (of Harlaw) becomes Lord of the Isles. Imposed abbey governance restrictions on "corrupt" MacKinnon excess :- *"the greatest tyrant who had his lands from the goods of the monastery"*.
- 1387.** Split from the opposing polity of Isle of Man, ***The Isles*** becomes a separate See under the archdiocese of York.

**c.1395-1421. 25 YEAR PARTNERSHIP of :- Donald of Harlaw and Clan Donald Prior and Abbot, John MacAllister.**

**c.1390-5.** Donald defeated the *"hateful and corrupt"* MacKinnons' attempted inside coup of the Lordship (their reaction to his abbey governance). Their Chief was hanged; their *"wicked"* Abbot Finguine "neutered" by Donald and "confined", despite the Pope confirming him "in possession" 1397, but removed 1405 by *commissio privationis*. He was expelled by Prior **John MacAllister**, obviously Donald's new abbey "Manager", 1395, who then commenced the long, difficult process of tracing and recovery of MacKinnons' *"usurped abbey property"* and reform of the impoverished, collapsed monastery. He *"devoted much of his career to securing full control of the monastic revenues as a preliminary to the repair of the abbey"*. **THEY BROKE THE CORRUPTION AND NEPOTISM OF THE "NEFARIOUS" FINGUINES (1st, 2nd, 3rd), THE MACKINNON LINEAGE OF ABBOT, SON PRIOR, SON MONK (c.1350 – 1450) and tamed the "moral delinquency of those wicked and perverse noblemen; unlawful occupiers, the greatest tyrants"**.

**1412-21.** Donald, 1386-1421, gifted the prestigious, precious and status raising reliquary of **St Columba's body part, via Abbot John MacAllister [clearly not to a MacKinnon!]**.

- 1421.**
- a.** Donald annexed three perpetual vicarages to the abbey to boost revenue and fund its reparation.
  - b.** Donald presents Dominic MacKenzie, from Ross, as the new abbot to continue MacAllister's reforms.

**1433.** Donald's son, Bishop Angus, first "native Bishop of the Isles", removed the **Cathedra, Bishop's Seat, from Skye to Iona. He petitioned for 12 cathedral canons/prepends. He is buried in his 'Monastic Cathedral'.**

**1443.** Under Donald's son **Alexander**, the power of Clan Donald reached its high tide. He threatened to ***"diminish the monastery"*** by invoking the serious and real threat of removing the *"relics and bones of his progenitors who are buried therein (Iona) and the precious things which have been given."* **He was in fact threatening to "shut the place down"**. [Why? The local MacKinnons were once again trying to 're-found' and continue their corruption under Finguine MacKinnon (III).] If he removed the bones of his ancestors (to their Oronsay or Saddell foundations) the nexus of *divine service* for souls in return for endowments to the abbey was breached and under *functional reciprocity* there was no obligation to continue that recurring income. Alexander died in Dingwall, **1449**.

**1450-80.** John, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord of the Isles, greatly enlarges and enhances the abbey church to Cathedral standard.

It was:- ***"So comprehensive a scale as to involve the destruction of nearly three-fourths (3/4s) of the structure."***  
(1462 : John's Grand Treaty of Ardtornish–Westminster with England..... What EXPECTATIONS!)

**1472.** Donald's grandson, Angus, becomes the Lordship's second Bishop of the Isles.

**IONA CATHEDRAL IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY.**

***"THE ROYAL FAMILY OF MACDONALD",***

***"FORMERLY KINGS OF THE WESTERN PARTS OF SCOTLAND AND THE ISLES."***

**INTERRUPTIONS:** OVER EARLDOM OF ROSS, 1402; KING JAMES I, 1406. Including Battle of Harlaw, 1411; Alexander imprisoned, 1427; Battle of Inverlochy, 1431.

## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT THE IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"?

Part IV - Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

At the time Abbot John MacAllister of Clan Donald died in 1421, Donald of Harlaw's personal "*chaplain and familiar*" was *Adam Dominici*, perpetual vicar of the parish church of *St Eugenius in Rossye*, or Kilviceowin, Ross (actually Kilvickieon, the Ross of Mull). Donald had Adam Dominici sent to the Roman Curia as his Officer in State, or ambassador, and had petitioned for a second benefice for his maintenance there<sup>1</sup>. From Rossye (this time the actual Earldom of Ross) was *Dominicus Dominici Kenychi* (MacKenzie) who was duly elected in 1421 as the new Abbot of Iona. He was confirmed and blessed by the Bishop of Sodor {Isles} and supplication made to the Apostolic See for the Pope's ratification and provision to the monastery. Dominic MacKenzie was also in Rome with Adam "*awaiting a grace of the Pope*" - he was nearly broke and also asking for "*whatsoever ecclesiastical benefice*" to tide him over.

It is evident that the Lord of the Isles, Donald of Harlaw (and later supported by his son Alexander, Earl of Ross), had directed this appointment of Dominic MacKenzie of Kintail, Wester Ross (*ius praesentandi* - see previous, the Lord of the Isles' right of presentation to the Bishop, who was then '*bound to bestow*'). Donald was managing the eight-generation-inherited enterprise of their Iona Abbey, placing his new man in charge and ensuring that the ground work of the previous *Prior Claustral*, then Abbot, Clan Donald's John MacAlasandar. Thus the work of recovering the "*better part of its lands and possessions that were preyed upon*" would continue unabated under his new appointee, Abbot Dominic MacKenzie from Ross.

The reason given in the supplication to Rome, 3 Dec 1421, for Lord Donald annexing three perpetual vicarages to Iona Abbey precisely relates to its "*threat of total ruin*" and it was he, the patrilineal heir of the abbey founder, and not Abbot Dominic MacKenzie, who had the power. He was making a financial decision to fund recovery because - "... *the monastery of Iona, Order of St Benedict, Sodor (Isles) Diocese, is so collapsed and impoverished in its buildings and rents that it is sinking to irreparable ruin, unless the Pope in his clemency provide an opportune remedy, especially because the revenues of the monastery do not suffice for its reparation..*"<sup>2</sup> In fact, Abbot MacKenzie supplicated to Rome in Nov 1421 that he could not be "*fittingly sustained*" by the abbey and asked ... "*the Pope to dispense him to rule and govern a parish church or its perpetual vicarage*" until such time as he may be "*sustained from the fruits of the monastery*".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McGurk, F. '*Calendar of papal letters to Scotland of Benedict XIII of Avignon, 1394-1419*'; pps 269, 275. 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Lindsay, ER. '*Calendar of Scottish supplications to Rome (CSSR); 1418-1422*'; p.271. 1934.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid (CSSR above); p.265.

**Kings were the principal abbey builders and re-builders, not abbots. They are the King's master masons or churchwrights, not the abbot's.** It was King Henry III of England who rebuilt almost the entire Westminster Abbey, costing him more than £41,000, the second most expensive building project in medieval England. It was not the abbot! The abbot is a big stakeholder obviously, having his monastery to run.

Why is it such a problematic concept to grasp, or accept, for the Western Isles when the paradigm is *pris pour acquis* in the rest of Scotland, England and Ireland, Wales? "*Indeed, the contribution of the native elements of Scotland in this respect remains an almost unwritten Chapter in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland*"<sup>4</sup>. For example :-

- "Edward the Confessor's wife, Edith, **financed the rebuild** of Wilton nunnery";
- (St) Margaret, mother of David I, was provided with a group of Benedictine monks by the Archbishop of Canterbury "**for the church she built** at Dunfermline"; 1072;
- "It was King David I who **rebuilt the abbey** as a much larger and more magnificent structure";
- "King Edgar of Scotland had granted the land of Coldingham to the Church of Durham in 1098, and a church was **constructed by him** and presented in 1100";
- "**Building of the (Holyrood) Abbey Church** began shortly after its foundation in 1128 by David I for the Augustinian Canons";
- Duncan, Earl of Carrick "**superintended the erection of the structure**" - Crossraguel Abbey, Ayrshire; c1244-50.

I could provide copious other examples to prove this point. It is undeniable, it was *not* the Iona Abbot who:-

- ✗ raised the building funds
- ✗ "*furnished resources to finance the project*";
- ✗ re-built the church into a cathedral
- ✗ "*provided the impetus to build or rebuild*".

"If the church connected with the patronage is threatened with total ruin, or the endowment with a deficit, if those first bound to restore it are not at hand, **the bishop** is to exhort **the patron (ie, the founder's heir/s)** to rebuild (*reœdificandum*) or renew the endowment (*ad redotandum*)" - The Catholic Encyclopaedia. And in this context, the abbey was not only physically decayed but also in financial ruin with meagre income and possessions - "*The monastery was collapsed, impoverished in its rents and of extreme poverty*"; "*Almost destroyed in its building and rents*". And the "*first bound*" was the Iona Abbot and his obedientaries who were "*not at hand*" - they were "*impoverished*". Case in point, 1426 :- 1. Who was the Bishop? - **Angus Macdonald, son of Donald**<sup>5</sup>. 2. Who was the Patron that Bishop Angus was exhorting? - **His grandfather, Alexander Macdonald, Lord of the Isles, Earl of Ross.**

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald RA; 1995. "Scoto-Norse Kings and the Reformed Religious Orders". 'Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies', Vol. 27, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pps. 187-219.

<sup>5</sup> (Angus) "The Bishop of Sodor (Isles) sat in Parliament, 10 March, 1429-30 (Acts of Parliament; ii. 28)". "*The bishops of Scotland: being notes on the lives of all the bishops, under each of the sees, prior to the reformation*"; Dowden, John, Bishop of Edinburgh; 1912.

If it was so simple and so easy to raise all the necessary funds to repair the “collapsed monastery” by petitioning the Pope to grant an indulgence of three years off purgatory to all pilgrims visiting Iona on St Columba’s feast day (9 June) and receive their donations (as commonly supposed and written), then why didn’t the previous MacKinnon Abbots ever do it? They didn’t even try, as Vatican records prove (eg, Calendars of Scottish Supplications to Rome, CSSR). What’s more, any pilgrim collection via this ‘exit purgatory fast lane’ indulgence would have been only a fraction of the enormous cost of replacing, enlarging and enhancing almost the entire existing church, including the central crossing tower (see the comparative plans at the end).

And, in any case, the contemporary 15th century Vatican records prove that through the “*moral delinquency of these wicked and perverse noblemen*” and “*unlawful Abbots charged with exploiting their position in favour of their kinsmen*”, that these particular MacKinnons would **not** have spent the donations on restoration, but on themselves! That is, for example, on their concubines, “*dowering them large on goods of the monastery*”.<sup>6</sup> As well, they “*usurped control of a substantial part of the abbey property*” and “*had their lands from the goods of the monastery*” by corruptly siphoning off the abbey’s income from the lands which were endowed, then re-endowed/confirmed (“*carta confirmationis*”) and also added to over the centuries, by whom? By the Macdonald Lords of the Isles, of course, endowing their lands of the Clan Donald! For example, Donald of Harlaw (1386-1421) : “*gave lands to the monastery of Iona, and every immunity which the monastery of Iona has from his ancestors over the centuries*” [by MacMhuirich, Clan Donald’s hereditary bards for 500 years].

When Donald of Harlaw ensured Iona Abbey would have much needed additional revenue coming in by uniting the best part of the “fruits” (income) of three perpetual vicarages to the abbey, this left a poorly paid “*temporal vicar, or more truly a hiring*” for the cure of the souls of the three very unimpressed communities:- Sorobie, Tiree, Kilfinichin of the south-western parts of Mull, ie, Kilcolmkill, Quinish, Mull district). That is, from the MacKinnons, who had mainly caused the decay and impoverishment of the abbey in the first place.

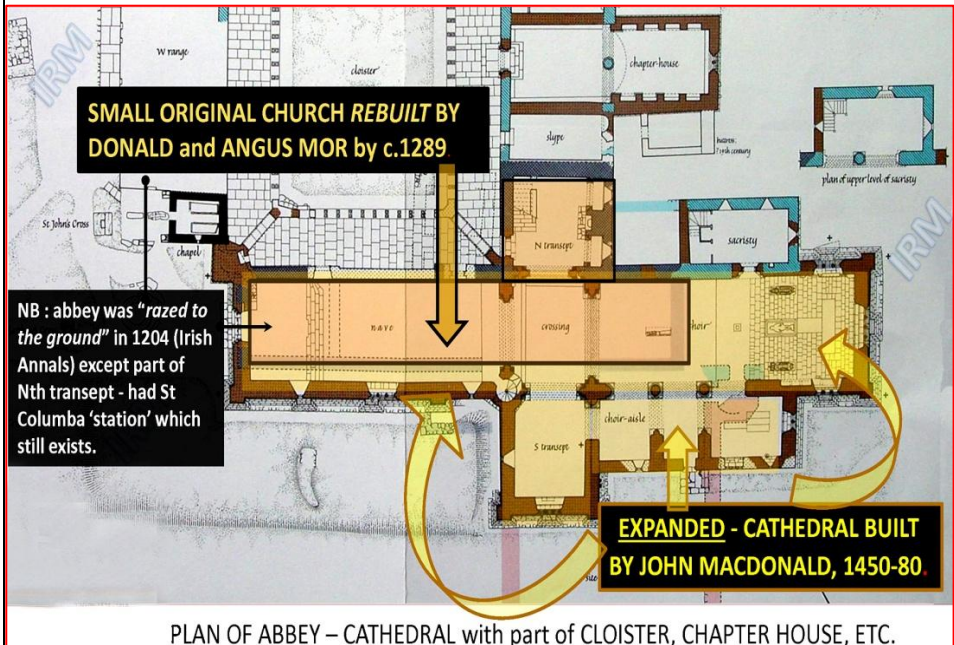
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<sup>6</sup> 1405 - “*To the bishops of Glasgow and Dunkeld. Mandate to summon Fingon (MacKinnon), Abbot of Hy (Iona), Sodor diocese, and to hear charges brought against him by John Goffredi (a Clan Donald MacAllister (“Goffredus Angusii called MacAlasandar, doncel (noble)” - g/grandson of the 3rd Macdonald Chief, Alexander Og, k.1299), prior claustral of the monastery, to the effect that Fingon had lived with concubines, had wasted the monastery’s goods, had used these goods as dowries for three daughters by a concubine, and had deprived the monastery of 400 merks sterling worth of goods.*” Reg Aven 319, 711-711V; McGurk, F. ‘Calendar of papal letters to Scotland of Benedict XIII of Avignon, 1394-1419’; pp144 (and pps 51,56). 1976.

**NB** : Iona Abbot John Goffredi MacAlasandar above, had a brother Angusii Goffredi whose son Alexander Angusii and his son Alexander II were both Abbots of Clan Donald’s Saddell Abbey, 1433 - 1456 and 1499 to the abbey’s closure in c.1508, respectively (stripped by Earl of Argyll).



It was then John Macdonald, Donald's grandson, who greatly enlarged and enhanced the "*collapsed, impoverished*" abbey church (c.1450-1480),<sup>7</sup> using none other than CLAN DONALD'S centuries-old hereditary churchwrights (architect/builder), chief masons and secretaries, the renowned O'Brolchans of St Columba's Derry, "*Chief Artificers of Ireland*".<sup>8</sup> John's new works were of "*so comprehensive a scale as to involve the destruction of nearly three-fourths of the structure.*" "**Donaldus O Brolchan fecit hoc opus**" ('Donal O Brolchan made this work'), incised on the capital of the south pier, east crossing, late 15th century. ... [ continued; next is the final.]



PLAN OF ABBEY – CATHEDRAL with part of CLOISTER, CHAPTER HOUSE, ETC.

<sup>7</sup> "**The patron** has the subsidiary duty of building" (re-iteration at the reforming Council of Trent, Sess. XXI, "de ref.", c. vii) - "*at one's private expense (aedificatio)*"; 1545-63.

<sup>8</sup> • NB : **1266** Treaty of Perth –'sovereignty' of the Hebrides passed from Norway to Scotland pushing the Clan Donald even closer back to Ireland.

• Somerled and Clan Donald's dominant interaction was with the Northern Uí Neill of N/W Ireland before the fall of lordship, 1493 (not Norway). That is, with Gaelic Derry, with the dominant O'Neill Kings of Tyrone and their sub-kings the Ó Catháins (O'Cahen; O'Kane), Ó Domnaills, and Ó Brolcháns. [The MacDonnells of Dunyvaig and the Glens were not materially established in the east, in Antrim, until very late in the 15th century.]

• Angus Og reconnected his dynasty's ancient Irish connections and cemented the more recent MacSomerled alliance with the Lords of Derry, by marriage to Áine Ó Catháin, in the early 14th century at Limavady, Tir Keeran, near Loch Foyle, Ulster. Áine, a Derry royal, was first married to The (Great) O'Neill. It will surprise many in Clan Donald that the mother of John, 1st Lord of the Isles, was Irish (Áine) and that he had a royal O'Neill half-brother. And also that Angus Og's sister married Brian O'Neill, King of Tyrone, c.1300. John and Áine travelled regularly to N/W Ireland.

## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT IONA "CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES"?

Fifth Part - Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

Ear of Ross and Lord of the Isles, John Macdonald, son of Alexander, instead of just economically restoring the existing dilapidated Abbey church, significantly enlarged and enhanced it over c.1450 to 1476 (his first forfeiture). He used his ever-increasing treasury and resources which were greatly boosted from 1426 by additional revenue from Ross and Skye. John did this with the clear ambition of raising its status to the dignity of the *Macdonald Cathedral of the Isles*.

John Macdonald's re-building enterprise employed Donald Ó Brolcháin of the Lordship's long serving hereditary chief masons, church-wrights, clerics and personal secretaries from the distinguished Derry family of abbots/bishops, past Coarbs of the St Columba Familia and Chief Lectors, Prime Artificers of Ireland. The Ó Brolcháins had been associated with Iona since the eponymous Donald's father, Reginald mac Somerled founded the abbey, the first Prior being Domnall Ua Brolcháin d.1203, and continued right throughout the Lordship. Somerled tried to refound Iona Abbey in 1164 and have Flaibhertach Ó Brolcháin, first Bishop of Derry, take the Abbacy - but failed on both counts. Another Ó Brolcháin was the personal secretary to Chief Alexander Macdonald and one was the master mason, Donald Ó Brolcháin, who rebuilt the cathedral and lastly to the Ó Brolcháin master graveslab carver who left Iona and went to the mainland c.1500 after the Lordship collapsed in 1493. The Ó Brolcháin Iona church wrights (master masons) and chief artificers were employed by successive Macdonald chiefs, not the Iona Abbot. These fear-ciuid (artificers, craftsman) of the *aes dana*, learned men, '*people of the gifts*', enjoyed high professional, secular status and held hereditary offices to the Macdonald Lords of the Isles, not to the Iona Abbots.

John, son of Alexander, was assisted by his cousin, Bishop Angus (II) Macdonald "*son of a bishop of Royal stock*"<sup>1</sup>, grandson of Donald of Harlaw and the exemplary reforming Abbot, Dominic MacKenzie from Wester Ross, kin of Chief Alexander Macdonald's mother, Mariota, Countess of Ross. In the 1430's Alexander was at peace with King James I, he was recognised by James as the Earl of Ross and became the Scotland's Chief Legal Officer, *Justiciar of Scotia*. Alexander had his centre of power in Ross at Dingwall and Inverness but his son John, of course later forfeiting Ross, was centred back in the Isles. It's worth reiterating that the first Macdonald Bishop, Angus, relocated his Seat, The Isles' Cathedra (throne), to the Iona Abbey Church in c.1433<sup>2</sup>, functioning probably as a form of the common 'Benedictine monastic cathedral chapter' (not the proposed chapter of secular canons).<sup>3</sup> Historically, there was no distinction between the *monastic cathedral chapters*, *monastic orders*, headed by a prior (all Benedictine) and those of the *secular canons headed by a dean*, in their relation to the bishop or diocese. They can be "numbered", in which case they are provided with a fixed prebend (appropriated benefice from parish revenue), or "unnumbered", in which

case the bishop indicates the number of canons according to the income. Over a period of time there is the exceptional convergence of a *Macdonald* patronised abbey (through patrilineal descent from founder) with *Macdonald* sponsored abbots, one a Clan Donald MacAlister and with two Bishops *Macdonald* and a kindred Maclean Bishop, John, 1<sup>st</sup> cousin, once removed of Chief Alexander. The King of Scots had the right to present the bishop candidate to the Archbishop of Nidaros, Norway, but note that the "*House of Macdonald*" as of John, son of Donald, was considered a "*Royal race*" with considerable influence. This convergence presents the opportunity to at least use a portion of Iona abbey's income (relatively wealthy in context of the west <sup>4</sup>) and episcopal/diocese and 'communa' funds revenue *specifically* for the shared cause of *both* needing a new church and chapter house (Iona's derelict and Snizort's untenable. For example, rents and tithes from the majority of parishes in the Diocese of the Isles that were not endowed to Iona abbey (albeit hard to collect). Also, the larger and grander decorated church/cathedral and the only in situ corporeal (body-part) relic/reliquary of St Columba, which were entirely the product of and acquired by the Macdonalds, would then have renewed a more regular pilgrim visitation with increased donations (not just on isolated special feast days and one off indulgences).

Stepping back a little in time, with the abbey's finances starting to come back under control:- Donald of Harlaw acquired and gifted to the Abbey c.1412-21 the priceless "*Hand of St Columba*" - a rarity and the only corporeal relic of St Columba repatriated from its five centuries of safekeeping in Derry, Ireland - a prestigious, sacred "Hebridean Holy Grail". Donald and his artists enshrined it in a 'charismatic' gold and silver reliquary of 'dazzling, wondrous beauty'. This event, of momentous religious significance and high political status, was achieved after a 25 year long partnership with his 2nd cousin, the Iona Cloistral Prior and lead reforming Abbot John MacAlaxandair (MacAlister) from a senior line of Clan Donald - descended from Chief Alaxandair Og, k.1299 ("*undoubtedly in the light of primogeniture they were the senior family of the line of Somerled*" <sup>5</sup>). The utmost importance of Saints relics and their reliquaries in this period cannot be over emphasised. "*Church relics play a crucial role in understanding the symbolic meaning of the place of worship in medieval Christianity; for they were the foundation of both the physical and the institutional church.*"

When was it first used? Almost surely on the Feast Day (death-translation) of St Columba, 9 June, 1412-20. Imagine the huge crowd consisting of the large retinue of the Lord of The Isles, Donald of Harlaw, the emotional pilgrims especially attracted that year (even without dispensations), the vassal Clan Chiefs with their lesser retinues, the church hierarchy of the Isles, Argyll and wider and the gathered locals, with scores of galleys beached and extra camps all around the Abbey's boundary - even in St Oran's graveyard (the custom). What a glorious sensation it would have been when the abbot (almost certainly John MacAlister) first came through the rood screen past all the choir monks singing Colmcille Feast Day chants. Holding the shining hand aloft, blessing the

congregation and then in procession to those gathered outside with embellished gestures of the "hand of St Columba" – a surreal blessing. What splendid satisfaction Donald would have had!

**RAISING OF IONA CATHEDRAL: 1433.** Some historians point out <sup>6</sup> that there are no records (discoverable) for cathedral chapter activity <sup>7</sup> at Iona for the Diocese of the Isles between 1433 and 1493 (final forfeiture) and surmise that the bishop's seat did not actually move to Iona before 1499, when the abbacy and the bishopric were combined '*in commendam*'. But neither are there such records which specify Snizort in this 60 year period, or after 1499 for Iona, so this argument is flawed. To fully explain why I say the bishop and therefore the diocese's seat, did move to Iona c.1433 would take a whole booklet but here are some main dot points • Snizort was a neglected, unpopular and unsuitable site for the Diocese's Seat • it was outside the Lordship of the Isles' territory at that time • the Diocese was subject to Nidaros/Trondheim, Norway and moving the bishop's seat, Cathedral, to Iona had centralising political benefits • why bother asking for 12 prebends to resource the chapter at Iona if it hadn't moved? • Sir Donald Munro, Archdeacon, or "*High Dean of the Isles*" (2nd to bishop) from 1549, was the *Vicar of Snizort* in 1526 and his maternal grandfather, Farquhar MacLean, was *Bishop of the Isles* from 1529 to 1544. Donald, with local and contemporary knowledge, notes in 1549 that Iona was the "*Cathedral Kirk of the Bischoppis of the Isles*" during the Lordship before forfeiture in 1493 • Bishops by long tradition had the right of being buried in *their* cathedral (elsewhere their palace) and Angus (I) Macdonald, d.1441, was "*provided the most precious blessing*" by being buried "*with his crosier and Episcopal habit, south side of the **great choir** which he selected for himself*" <sup>8</sup> of the Cathedral of Iona Abbey (his uncontested burial location). A "*great choir*" designates cathedral status. The only church having a great choir in the Isles was Iona. Snizort had neither transepts nor aisles - no "great choir".

It is of the utmost importance to appreciate this : - "*The transfer of Iona Abbey **in commendam** to the Bishop of the Isles*" in 1498/9, was *not* about raising the dignity of the Iona church to cathedral status, as usually declared. There is nothing in any wording to contradict that Iona was already the bishop's seat, the Cathedral of the Isles. The petition was for the "*erection of the abbacy of Colmkyl in the **bischoppis sete of the Illis***". And no prebends, resources for canons of a cathedral chapter were requested in 1498/9 (or afterwards and one didn't appear to operate). "*In canon law, 'in commendam' was a form of transferring an ecclesiastical benefice* (usually during a vacancy) *in trust to the custody of a patron*". The practice was open to serious abuse. It had become a regular form of corruption to strip assets from abbeys leading up to and after the Reformation. This transfer's principal objective was a power grab of the functions, responsibilities and therefore resources of the abbot to the bishop, that is the *commendator*, regardless of whether Iona was already the Diocese's Seat or not. It was a corporate raid or hostile takeover if you like. Commendators were regularly feuing

(transferring – siphoning off) abbey lands to family members. Pensions were granted from revenues of the bishopric and the recipients were family members. Favoured bishops began to receive multiple benefices, accepting them like absentee landlords, increasing their personal possessions to the detriment of the Church. Often these commendatory abbots were laymen, vassals of the kings, or others who were authorized to draw the revenues and manage the temporal affairs of the monasteries in reward for military services, like the Earls of Argyll as liegemen of the Stewart Kings.

So, who was instrumental in this Iona Abbey transfer *in commendam* in 1498/99? It was none other than Archibald, 2nd Earl of Argyll, the petitioner, supported by his enabler,<sup>9</sup> King James IV and his son, James Stewart (Duke of Ross)<sup>10</sup> the new Archbishop of St Andrews from 1497, which was now the Metropolitan See, controlling the Isles' Diocese! And who was the first Iona Abbey Commendator? It was *Eóin Caimbeul I* (son of 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Argyll) - and then others were, Eóin Caimbeul II and then Eóin Caimbeul III and also four more Campbell "property managers" (and four Macleans) who all, over the next century, rapaciously regarded Iona Abbey's resources, Clan Donald's endowments and generous benefactions over 300 years, as their hereditary "family propriety interest"! They had all entered Clan Donald's "*monastery rather by reason of succession than from devotion*". To credit the 1st and 2nd Earls of Argyll with raising the *dignity*(?) of the abbey church to Cathedral status is a both a monumental travesty and dishonour to Clan Donald's legacy of medieval Iona Abbey and Cathedral. [cont. ....]

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<sup>1</sup> Stewart Royalty - marriage of John, Lord of the Isles, to Margaret Stewart in c.1350. "*Clerics and Clansmen*" - see n.5 below.

<sup>2</sup> In a papal petition of 1433, he requested permission to move his cathedral from Snizort to 'some honest place within the diocese'. *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome Volume IV 1433-1447*, p 25. ed. A.I. Dunlop and D. MacLauchlan. 1983. "The criticism of a lack of honesty may therefore reflect political considerations, rather than poor religious practices" - *Bishop's Careers; Becoming a Bishop in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>3</sup> Dobson, Barrie; "*The English Monastic Cathedrals in the Fifteenth Century*"; Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Vol. 1 (1991), pp. 151-172.

<sup>4</sup> The Lordship of Isles territory included two bishoprics (Sodor/Isles and Argyll), four monastic houses (Iona Abbey and Nunnery, Saddell, Oransay) and approx. 64 parish churches of which the Lords had patronage of 41. Sarah Thomas; "*Bishops, priests monks and their patrons : the Lords of the Isles and the Church*".

<sup>5</sup> Revs. Angus Macdonald; "*THE CLAN DONALD - VOL 1*", p.89. 1896.

<sup>6</sup> Iain G. MacDonald; "*Clerics and Clansmen: The Diocese of Argyll Between the Twelfth and Sixteenth Centuries*"; 2013. Sarah E Thomas, University of Hull. "*From cathedral of the Isles to obscurity – the archaeology and history of Skeabost Island, Snizort*".

<sup>7</sup> A corporation of canons which had a role in the administration of a cathedral (dignitaries : Dean, Precentor, Chancellor, Treasurer) and were the bishop's *consilium*. The chapter was hardly functioning with many vacancies on Snizort and probably was similar at Iona.

<sup>8</sup> Niall MacMhuirich (hereditary poets to Macdonald). '*The Red Book of Clanranald - The Macdonald History*'. Early 17th Century. In '*Reliquiae Celticae VOL II*', 1894.

<sup>9</sup> D. E. R. Watt. '*The Heads of Religious Houses in Scotland from 12th to 16th Centuries*'; 2001. pp: 203-4.

<sup>10</sup> King James V used the church as a source of income and for appointments for his illegitimate children and favourites.

## WHO RESOURCED AND BUILT IONA “CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES”?

Final Part VI – FINAL: Ian Ross Macdonnell, Australia.

### HOW IONA ABBEY HISTORY HAS PLAYED OUT

**OPENING ACT** :- St Columba and the early Christians of late antiquity steal the opening scene, which gets rave reviews by the 8th Duke of Argyll:- *"The fire, the freshness and the comparative simplicity of the old Celtic church; **the real period of Iona's glory, almost confined to the life of one man** and to the few generations which preserved the impress of his powerful character"*.

**FINAL ACT** :- This is a rousing tribute to the much eulogised "extraordinary polymath, Liberal statesman, philosopher and theologian", George, the 8th Duke of Argyll, for purportedly having the vision and generosity to restore Iona Abbey *"as you see it today"* and return it to the community. From Historic Scotland : *"The 8th Duke began reconstructing the abbey church, with the intention that it be used for ecumenical worship"*. The fact is George only responded to repeated pressure <sup>1</sup> to just stabilise some of the crumbling ruins (originally destroyed by his antecedent Earls!) and to allow unequal access to supervised and segregated Catholic and Anglican services on Iona. It was not ecumenism, but conciliation or appeasement. The imposed, 'refereed' access to segregated, unequal amenities is not embryonic ecumenism or anything even resembling a nascent, 40 year later, Iona Community. "Unification" it was not.

The 8th Duke of Argyll did not agree with The Oxford Movement, the precursor to ecumenism, eg, from his autobiography and memoirs <sup>2</sup>, pps 309-12, *"Then I had watched from the beginning the progress of the Oxford Movement, noting specially that its central idea was a theory on the nature and authority of the Church which **differed from that of Rome in nothing** except in the absence of a central authority or head. **I have also lived to see a recrudescence of the Romanising tendency which followed the Oxford Movement.**"* And p.103; *"...the famous Oxford Movement was in its full swing. The air was ringing with the cry of Puseyism. Under these circumstances, I heard the service performed in a way that **could not make on me any favourable impression**"*.

In my view, the Duke had a *Love Columba hate Pope* relationship with Iona. He would have preferred the medieval Abbey never to have existed:- *"all these building before us are the monument of the dull and often the corrupt monotony of medieval Romanism"*. He was proud of 'owning' Iona not because of the medieval Abbey but because of his love for the island's nature and particularly its association with one man, St Columba.

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<sup>1</sup> Under "loud calls" and "increasing pressure on the Duke(s) of Argyll" (RCAHMS; 'ARGYLL VOL4'; p.12). 1839 :- " .., there is a loud call on the noble Duke, to adopt proper measures to keep up this venerable fabric". 'Lumsden & Son's Steam-boat companion, or, Stranger's guide to the Western Isles & Highlands'; J. Lumsden & Son; 1839; p177.

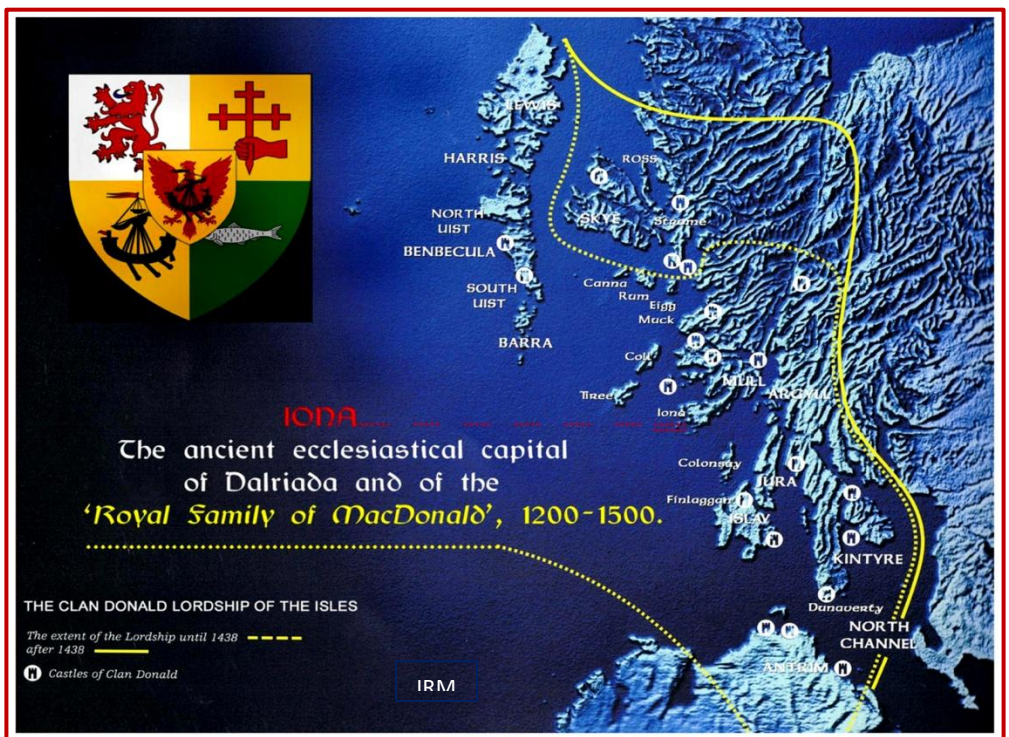
<sup>2</sup> The 1300 plus pages, two volume, "George Douglas, Eighth Duke of Argyll, K.G., K.T. (1823-1900) : autobiography and memoirs"; Ed. Ina, the Dowager Duchess of Argyll; 1906.



It is hyperbole to credit him for Iona Abbey's restoration, but even more so to expound that his purpose was to allow ecumenical worship (further detail here:- <https://goo.gl/WmkWnn> ).

**CENTRAL ACTS** :- (in every sense of the words). THE CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES' central role in the very creation, continued existence, restoration and development of the Abbey and Cathedral has been virtually written out of the story. This enduring Macdonald phase, 1207-1493, which equals the long 300 year period of primary Columban monasticism, is downplayed and virtually forgotten, even though it is paramount in providing the sole witness to Iona's extant architecture, and is a principal witness to the surviving monuments. Nothing remains of St Columba's monastery. Nothing remains of the three ancient *Tomair-nan-Righ* of the early Dalriadic, Scots, Irish and Norwegian kings (600-1200).

The only original monument left standing today from St Columba's early Christian monastery is St Martin's cross and that is 200 years after St Columba died. **For all intents and purposes, Iona Abbey is currently an early Clan Donald medieval site in terms of the surviving architecture** (as restored 20th century).





**REVIEW.** FALL OF THE LORDSHIP OF THE ISLES - 1493. Disregarding Martin Luther's *"Two Kingdoms"* for separation of Church and State and Knox's *"First Book of Discipline"* that all of the assets of the old church should pass to the new, the ruling Argyll Earls began using their privileged Royal connections to partake heavily of "the fruits" of Iona's benefices and revenue as soon as the Macdonald Lordship was forfeited for a second time, 1493. They regarded it as their hereditary "family propriety interest" (see Part V). They suppressed it and shared to an unknown extent in the dissolution "*plunder of Iona*", with the Mcleans, of :- library books and manuscripts of great value, Registers (so called "*dispersed and lost*"), some gold and silver plate and the tower bell. They were instrumental in physically destroying the Abbey, being the responsible local "*Leaders in the Field for the Reformed Religion*" and 'lost' 300 priceless Iona graveslab inscriptions of the "*best men of all the isles*" (compiled in the 1650's by Sir Robert Moray).

(1.) **Archibald Campbell, the all powerful 5th Earl of Argyll, 1561** :- "An Act was passed by the Privy Council suppressing *"Idolatri and all monumentis thair of"* and Arran, Glencairn and Argyll were dispatched to the west to carry the Act into execution". It is said that his 'army' was bigger than that of England and France. He "*bombarded with cannon*", destroying Iona Abbey!

(2.) **Archibald Campbell, 8th Earl and 1st Marquess of Argyll (1607–1661)** :- effective ruler of Scotland; Leader of "Committee of Estates"; "*Leader in Council and in Field for The Reformed Religion*". Following the Synod of Argyll 1642, he went around the Isles destroying various crosses and "*idolatrous monuments*". He was said to have overthrown "*some of the finest monuments of the (Iona) monastery and the altars*" and "*dispersed*" the valuable, irreplaceable library (Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, Scotland (RCAHMS), 1977).



It is vital in understanding this history not to separate the destruction of Clan Donald, the "Daunting of the Isles" to end "400 years of barbarism" and the destruction of Iona Abbey by these two Earls of Argyll. Their acts were utterly integral. Once all "the fruits" of the abbey were stripped, including by seven successive Earl of Argyll's Commendators ("property managers - family proprietary interest"! ) and the wealth transfer mainly to the reforming Calvinist elite had occurred, the edifice that was created by Clan Donald, its ecclesiastical capital and Cathedral of the Isles in all but name, needed to be 'erased' from memory - like the 'papists and the highland barbarous savages'.

**THE EARLY CAMPBELL EARLS** did not contribute one iota to Iona Abbey or its cathedral rebuild (or any abbey at all). At dissolution, the property "*fell into the hands of*" the Mull Macleans for nothing (*Act of Convention of Estates*, 1561-74),<sup>3</sup> then to the Campbells by force in 1692 ("50 Year War") after trying to buy it at a fraction of the face value in 1674 by 'leveraging' Maclean debt bought by them over years.<sup>4</sup>

Over 1833-54, George William, the 6th Duke of Argyll, and John, the 7th Duke, 1839, and George John, the 8th Duke, 1847, were urged by the Society of Antiquities (via Norwegian scholar P. Munch) including by its early Secretary, Donald Gregory, the famous historian, Celtic scholar and antiquarian and by the Iona Club, to protect the Abbey buildings and St Oran's tombstones. The Rt. Hon. Godfrey William Macdonald was an Iona Club member, 1835. George, the 8th Duke of Argyll did not do any actual restoration of the Abbey's fabric.

He openly played down and disdainfully spurned this medieval abbey's significance and status during 1200-1560. It is surprising and very telling that in the Duke's memoirs he never once mentions Iona Abbey or ecumenism. He was neither attracted nor attached to either. Finally, in 1874, under community and institutional pressure, another "loud call" by the Society of Antiquities (RCAHMS; Vol 4; p.151), the 8th Duke eventually did some more stabilising to prevent further falls and decay - caused in the first place through the abbey's destruction by his forebear's cannon about 350 years before! (see presentation: <https://goo.gl/2WPNa0>). They exerted, quote "*pressure*", on the Duke to stop further crumbling! *Pressured*, ie, not influenced or persuaded.

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<sup>3</sup> NB: If the Lordship of the Isles was not forfeited 1493, and had remained united, then the Reformation would have seen all the Abbey's assets returned effectively to (under) Clan Donald's headship control, viz, the Act of Convention of Estates, 1561-74, with local Macleans employed there only as vassals: factor, bailiff, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Maclean, Sir Allan, 20th Chief of Clan Maclean, d.1674. Manfully resisted Campbells, but offered a settlement of debt which was rejected by Campbells, who were unwilling to compromise. Archibald Campbell, 10th Earl of Argyll, 1st Duke of Argyll, 1658-1703 :- When William of Orange came to power, the forfeited lands of his father were restored to him. He accepted the surrender of Duart and Cairnburgh Castles from Macleans in 1692, thus finally gaining the Duart Estate.

Then, twenty-five years later, in 1899, with very little else done, at death's door and under gentle coercion and obvious spousal pleading by his third wife Ina (nee MacNeill), <sup>5</sup> he signed a Trust Deed and handed the abbey back to the church ("established"/National) to let them restore it at their own and public expense. (NB: it was, to be honest, rightfully theirs in any case, ie, Knox's '*First Book of Discipline*' stipulating assets of the old church should pass to the new.)

Then the Abbey's restoration was performed by the community through public subscription and free labour, with Sir James Lithgow, the battleship builder, giving £5000 <sup>6</sup> to Rev. George MacLeod (£250,000 today). The Iona Community obtained the approval out of a number of those interested in the site, partly because of the work and plans already done by Sir David Russell, owner of the Fife paper mills. ("*Spirituality was a living concept to Sir David Russell, and his biography tells of his role as instigator of the Iona Retreat.*") A decisive factor in the timing and decision by the Church of Scotland to award the scheme to George MacLeod was to ensure a site on Iona was not turned into a "Popish" breeding ground by the wealthy Marquis of Bute who wanted to buy the island in 1938 and "*there was alarm that Iona might be turned into a Catholic seminary*"! What other historically significant religious site in Scotland with important Abbey ruins was handed over to an Ecumenical Community around that time as a matter of State policy? In the very same year, 1938, George MacLeod was awarded the site, after a decade of a number of other people showing continued interest, and he went ahead "*using Russell's plans for the restoration of the Iona buildings.*" [Those interested include Sir David Russell, The American Iona Society, George MacLeod, Clare Vyner (owner of Fountains Abbey), the Marquis of Bute.]

The issue being highlighted here is that the ecumenical Iona Community's success in winning the "tender" for Iona Abbey had nothing whatsoever to do with the so called "reconstructing intents" or "vision" for Iona Abbey by the 8th Duke of Argyll, or anything to do with his Deed of Trust returning the site back to the church (to the Cathedral Trust) or anything to do with him having a positive view of ecumenical worship (Besides, "*The contemporary ecumenical movement for Protestants is often said to have started with the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference*" – the Duke died in 1900.) Any links are a product of "reconstructive intents" or hagiographic gloss of others, not by the Dukes. It must be kept in mind also that this occurred nearly 40 years after the 8th Duke died.

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<sup>5</sup> The 8th Duke's third wife, *Ina Erskine MacNeill* of Colonsay (1874-1925), m.1895, was invested as a Lady, Royal Order of Victoria and Albert, and held the office of Extra Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Victoria. She died 25 years after George and made the notable, very personal decision to be buried in Iona Abbey church (not Colonsay) and oversaw the pairing and matching of her white Carrara marble monument with her husband George's (his in 1912). Why didn't Ina lie beside her husband at Kilmun like other Earls/Duke's wives? There was space to 1949. All this indicates Ina was a key driving force behind any real sympathy of the Duke towards Iona Abbey. Not the same as, but similar to Agnes Douglas, Catholic wife of the **7<sup>th</sup> Earl** who influenced his late conversion. The "*Duchess's Cross*" was erected in 1878 north of the Iona Abbey for Elizabeth, by the 1<sup>st</sup> wife of **8<sup>th</sup> Duke**. It's patently obvious that it was the wives of this Duke who had the real and sincere affinity with medieval Iona Abbey.

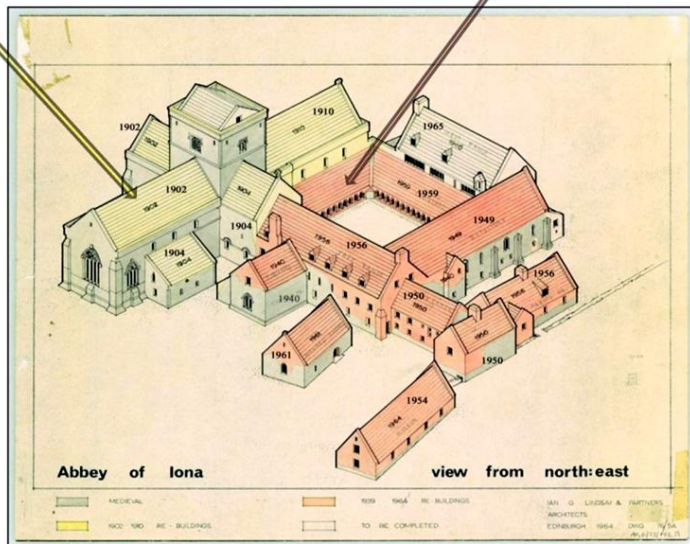
<sup>6</sup> Macintyre, Lorn; *Sir David Russell: A Biography*; 1995. Uni. of St Andrews; Call Number MS 38515; Papers of Sir David Russell; 1826-1991.

**IONA ABBEY, AS YOU SEE IT TODAY, IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY :-**

**AS RESTORED 20<sup>TH</sup> C. WITH PUBLIC MONEY & COMMUNITY LABOUR BY :**

**1. THE CATHEDRAL TRUST (1902-1910).**

**2. THE IONA COMMUNITY (1938-1965)**



IRM

The Campbells enjoy a disproportionate amount of the accolades for “returning” and “restoring” the Abbey, when very little of it at all or the exact opposite is the truth. In 1979 “*Heavy estate taxes led the 12th Duke of Argyll to sell the island of Iona. The Hugh Fraser Foundation bought Iona for the nation; ownership transferred to the National Trust for Scotland*” (NY Times, Apr 2001).

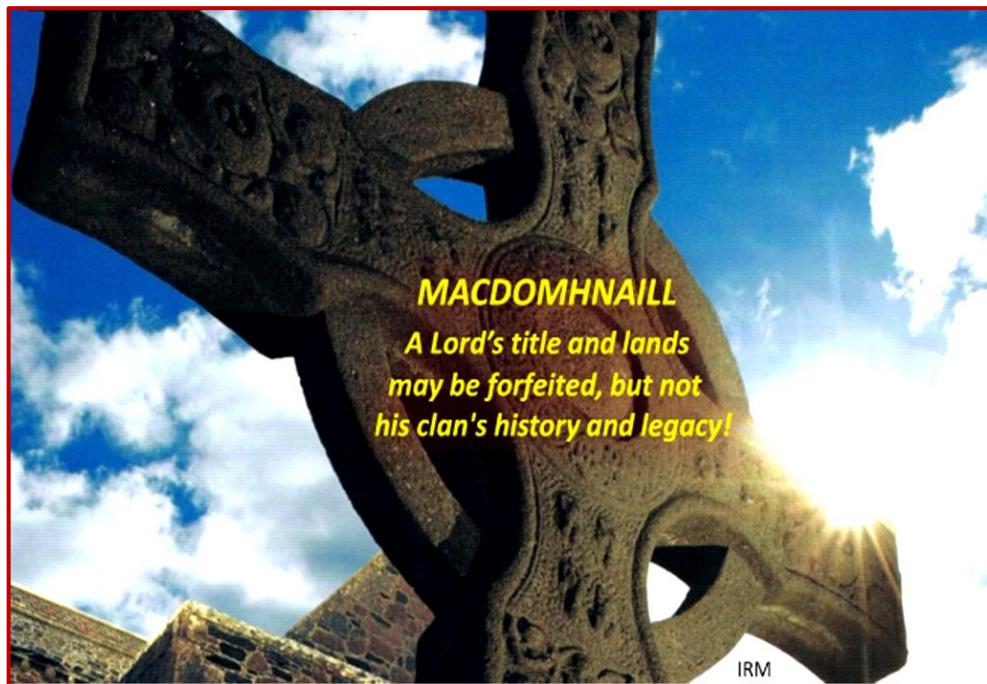
**SUMMARY.** When it comes to who is most associated with “Iona Abbey”, the lion’s share of attention is focused on the internationally famous, iconic St Columba, the early Christian era and Iona’s Hiberno-Scottish mission. Then fast-forwards to (the recency of) the regional celebrity of the so called “extraordinary” Renaissance Man, the 8th Duke of Argyll, with the large white carrara marble effigies of himself and wife Ina so dominant in the cathedral (taking up the entire south transept). The inclusion of George’s effigy in the Abbey gives an artificial reading that this Abbey has significantly benefited from the patronage and benefaction of the Dukes of Argyll - and he is not even buried there.<sup>7</sup> This leaves the Clan Donald Lords of the Isles forfeit of any due recognition, outside of the minimalist role of being called benefactors or patrons.

<sup>7</sup> He is buried in the Campbell Chief’s mausoleum at Kilmun Church, near Dunoon, Cowal Peninsula (1st wife beside him as normal), where he would have been buried regardless of that transept not being restored until 1902.

This is a gross understatement of their fundamental contribution to this medieval infrastructure, the resulting macroeconomics of the region at the time and the truly extraordinary three centuries' long existence of Iona Abbey and its Cathedral of the Isles. In many respects, they are sidelined, what's more anonymously, to St Oran's Chapel. It is all substantively misleading in terms of a proper interpretation of the history of the site's extant architecture :- *"probably the completest and most interesting group of ancient ecclesiastical structures in Scotland"*.<sup>8</sup>

Is the 8th Duke of Argyll's incongruous monument in the Abbey Church, minus his remains, a reflection of his exaggerated role in its 20th century re-birth or a statement and constant reminder of the plunder, demise and destruction of this whole medieval abbey by his dynasty over the 16th and 17th centuries?

A solution to that interpretative and ethical dilemma is to acknowledge authentically and publicly the following historical fact : Medieval Iona Abbey, as you see it today (restored in the 20th century), is principally the legacy of the 15th century Clan Donald Lords of The Isles and their Clan Donald Abbots and Bishops. And Iona Abbey Church is, in all but name, the Clan Donald's Cathedral of The Isles.



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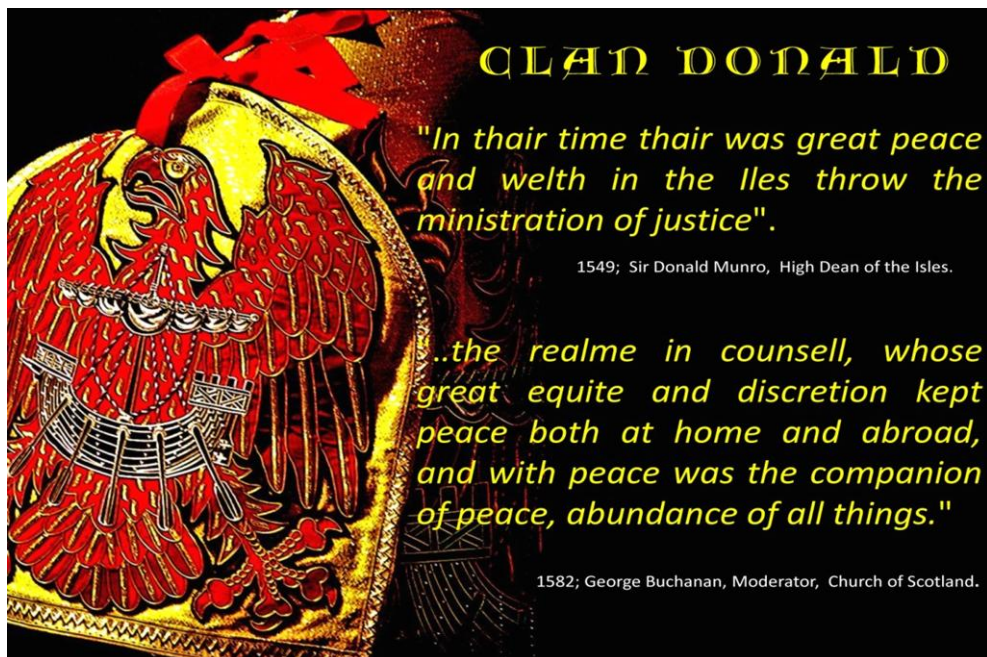
<sup>8</sup> MacGibbon, David; Ross, Thomas; *"The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland, VOL III; pps 48, 49; 1897.*



During the tenuous, seventeen-year period between his two forfeitures (1476 and 1493), and interspersed with his headstrong heir Angus Og's destructive reprisals, a Cathedral petition to the Pope by Lord Macdonald (to officially raise Iona Abbey to Cathedral status) had absolutely no prospect of obtaining King James IV's required endorsement. But, in 1499, with its characteristics and attributes entirely unchanged or improved, Iona Abbey church acted '*de facto Cathedral*' under Eoin Cambuil I, *Abbey Commendator* and Bishop of the Isles, nephew of a new 1498 petitioner, Archibald Campbell, 2nd Earl of Argyll.<sup>9</sup>

Lord of the Isles John Macdonald died in 1503. In 1506, the Cathedral was confirmed. "***O Children of Conn, be resolute and fierce, be forceful and stand your ground, Now is the time for you to win recognition***", that :-

**IONA CATHEDRAL OF THE ISLES IS CLAN DONALD'S LEGACY.**  
***"Còir fhògradh - "It is right to proclaim it."***



1549; Sir Donald Munro, High Dean of the Isles.

1582; George Buchanan, Moderator, Church of Scotland.

Ian Ross Macdonnell, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Archibald, 2nd Earl of Argyll, the petitioner, supported by his enabler, King James IV and his son, James Stewart (Duke of Ross) the new Archbishop of St Andrews from 1497, which was now the Metropolitan See, controlling the Isles' Diocese! *Commendators* were regularly feuing (transferring – siphoning off) abbey lands to family members. Pensions were granted from revenues of the bishopric and the recipients were family members. King James V used the church as a source of income and for appointments for his illegitimate children and favourites.



## CLAN DONALD & IONA ABBEY 1200 - 1500

THE EARLY CLAN DONALD AND THEIR IMMEDIATE ANTECEDENT ANTECEDENT *REGINALD mac SOMERLED* WERE THE UNRIVALLED ENDOWERS, FUNDERS, BUILDERS, PATRONS, PROTECTORS AND GENEROUS BENEFACTORS OF IONA'S ABBEY, CATHEDRAL, NUNNERY AND MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE, 1205 - 1503.

### THE KINGS AND LORDS OF THE WESTERN PARTS OF SCOTLAND & ISLES

1156 - 1164 : **SOMERLED  
KING OF THE ISLES**

- EXPELLED THE VIKINGS AND WON BACK THE ISLES. TRIED TO RESTORE COLUMBAN PRIMACY FOR IONA. BUILT THE CURRENT ST ORAN'S CHAPEL AND IS BURIED THERE.
- *"FOUNDED BY THE SPEAR, SLAIN BY THE SWORD, SOMERLED DIED."*

1205 - 1207 : **REGINALD**

- ABBEY FOUNDER. ORIGINAL ENDOWER\* OF BENEDICTINE ABBEY AND NUNNERY. LIVED TO BUILD THE MICHAEL CHAPEL. NOMINATED HIS SISTER BETHAG AS NUNNERY'S 1ST PRIOR.
- *"THE MOST DISTINGUISHED OF THE GALL OR GAEL FOR PROSPERITY AND GENEROSITY..."*

1207 - 1247 : **DONALD**

- *"OF THE STATELY GAZE."* CLAN DONALD'S FOUNDER. HE BUILT THE ABBEY CHURCH. IONA IS CLAN DONALD'S ANCIENT ECCLESIASTICAL CAPITAL.

1247 - 1292 : **ANDRUS MOR**

- COMPLETED THE CHURCH. CLAUSTRAL BUILDINGS AND THE NUNNERY.
- *"FROM YOU, COLUM GILLE CAME OVER THRICE TO HELP US - O SCION OF TARA."*

\* ENDOWMENT IS NOT A ONCE ONLY EVENT AND IT'S CONDITIONAL.

*"Remained generous benefactors to the abbey throughout."*

IT'S A CONTINUING PROCESS BY THE FOUNDER'S PATRILINEAL SUCCESSORS *"Unrivalled among the barons of Scotland as monastic patrons."*

1292 - 1299 : **ALEXANDER 06**

- *"BEST MAN OF HIS TRIBE."* KILLED IN IRELAND FIGHTING MACDOUGALLS. UNDEPOSED.

1299 - 1318 : **ANDRUS 06**

- *"MY HOPE IS CONSTANT IN THEE."* VITAL ROLE WITH ROBERT BRUCE, BANNOCKBURN, 1314.

1318 - 1387 : **GOOD JOHN OF ISLAY**

- *"DOMINUS INSLARUM."* INITIAL IMPETUS FOR IONA SCHOOL OF STONE CARVING.

1387 - 1421 : **DONALD OF HARLAW**

- *"SONS OF CONN REMEMBER."* CRUSHED MACKINNON EXPLOITATION. LAST BURIED IONA.

1421 - 1449 : **ALEXANDER**

- *"A GRAND MAN, CALLED MACDONALD."* BURIED CHANONRY OF ROSS, INVERNESS.

1449 - 1503 : **JOHN II**

- *"THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE GAEL TO CLAN COLLA, IT IS RIGHT TO PROCLAIM IT."*

HE FUNDED & BUILT THE CATHEDRAL OF ISLES, IONA. LAST MACDONALD LORD OF ISLES.

IN THE 15TH CENTURY THERE WERE TWO MACDONALD ABBOTS OF IONA AND TWO MACDONALD BISHOPS OF THE ISLES.

DONALD OF HARLAW GIFTED IONA ABBEY (ABBOT, JOHN MACALXANDAIR) WITH THE GOLD AND SILVER RELIQUARY *"HAND OF COLUMBA."*

The dominion of the *Royal family of MacDonald* was evident in their thirty castles throughout the *Lordship of the Isles*.